



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT



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ISSN: 2226-6348

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v2-i1/9765>

DOI: 10.6007/IJARPED/v2-i1/9765

Received: 11 January 2013, Revised: 13 February 2013, Accepted: 10 March 2013

Published Online: 26 March 2013

In-Text Citation: (Uwameiye & Salami, 2013)

To Cite this Article: Uwameiye, B. E., & Salami, L. I. (2013). Assessment of the Impact of the UNICEF Supported School Feeding Programme on Attendance of Pupils in Federal Capital Territory. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2(1), 209–218.

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Vol. 2(1) 2013, Pg. 209 - 218

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Assessment of the Impact of the UNICEF Supported School Feeding Programme on Attendance of Pupils in Federal Capital Territory

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of the school feeding programme on the attendance of pupils in FCT Abuja Nigeria. The research design adopted for this study was the expo-facto. A total of 385 pupils under the school feeding programme and 217 pupils under the non-school feeding schools were used for the study. A checklist was used to obtain the data on attendance of pupils from the daily class register. One research question and a hypothesis were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance. The data were analysed using percentages and bar charts while the hypothesis was tested using t-test. Based on the analysis, these were the findings; **1** the implementation of school feeding programme in the selected primary schools brought about increased annual percentage attendance of pupils under the school feeding Schools. Attendance of pupils in school feeding schools was significantly different from the attendance of pupils without the school feeding schools, in favour of the pupils under the school feeding programme; Based on the findings; one of the recommendations made was that; The Federal Government of Nigeria should promulgate policies that will focus on how the school feeding programme can be effectively implemented in all the states of the country.

Keywords: Impact, School Feeding Programme, School Attendance, Pupils, Education

Introduction

School feeding programme is an organized programme that alleviates hunger while supporting education, health and community development (WFP, 2007). School feeding can be provided as meals or snacks to be eaten during school hours or distributed as dry take home food ration to pupils at the end of each day, month or school term, if they attended school regularly. It is a versatile safety net that is used as platform to support children and their families in a variety of contexts. In line with this, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated the Home Grown School Feeding and Health Programme (HGSFHP) in conjunction with The United Nation Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in order to address the gaps in basic education. UNICEF is the main partner in Nigeria supporting the quality of education through the school feeding by providing

technical assistance. The programme which was launched on September 26, 2005 at Pilot Science Primary School, Kuje Abuja took off with 2.5 million pupils with the following expected outcomes:

1. To alleviate short term hunger: Short term hunger is a transitory non-clinical form of hunger that can affect physical and learning capacity. As is well known, Children who are hungry in class are more likely to have difficulty concentrating; and performing complex tasks, even if they are well nourished (Del Rosso and Marxeek, 1996)
2. To increase school attendance, retention and completion of basic schooling: The food given to pupils is expected to attract pupils to school, retain them in school and is to serve as an incentive for families to release their ward for schooling, especially children from vulnerable group
3. To reduce gender inequalities in education: School feeding programme is expected to directly tackle gender inequalities by attracting girls to schools. Also SFP generates opportunities for assisted pupils to share a nutritious meal regardless of their status, social class and gender.
4. To improve health and nutritional status of pupils: School feeding is expected to provide macronutrients together with essential vitamins enabling pupils to learn, function and develop physically and intellectually.

The launching of the school feeding programme in Nigeria may have stimulated the interest of teachers, parents, pupils and governments to basic education. Perhaps these stakeholders in education in Nigeria could be sceptical about the efficacy of the school feeding programme since literature in the African sub-region is scanty in this area. In addition, Federal Capital Territory is strategic to this study since it is a centre of unity where all Nigerians congregate in all works of life. Therefore, investigating the impact of the UNICEF Supported School Feeding Programme on attendance of pupils in Federal Capital Territory Abuja is relevant in the face of the Millennium Development Goals.

Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis that was tested in this study include:

There is no significant difference between the attendance of primary school pupils under the school feeding programme and those pupils without school feeding programme in FCT?

Methodology

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was ex-post facto design. The study was concerned with the impact of the independent variables (Unicef Supported School Feeding Programme) on attendance pupils which is the criterion variable. Rather than create these manifestations, the researcher is simply examining how the independent variables impact on school attendance characteristics of pupils in Federal Capital Territory.

Population for the Study

The population for this study consisted of all pupils in primary schools in FCT, who were in school three years before and three years after the introduction of the school feeding programme. The population of pupils in primary schools in FCT was 326,264. The number of schools that benefited from the school feeding programme in FCT was 45.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The multistage sampling technique was utilized for this study. For this study, FCT, Abuja which has six area councils was used. From each area council, one primary school under the school feeding programme for three years, and one primary school without the school feeding programme were randomly selected for the study through the balloting technique. A total of 12 schools were used for the study. The six schools under the school feeding yielded a total of 385 pupils. While the non-schools yielded a total of 217 pupils.

Instrumentation

The instrument that was used for gathering data in this study was the checklist. The checklist was used to gather data on attendance of pupils from the schools daily register.

Administration of Instrument

This researcher engaged the services of 3 research assistants who were trained on the rudiments of the administration of the instruments. They possessed minimum academic qualification of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Also the research assistants had good knowledge of the localities where the study was carried out.

Validity of Instruments

The validity of the instrument (checklist) was determined by experts in the Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies, University of Benin, Benin City. The experts individually subjected the items in the checklist to rigorous scrutiny with a view to ascertaining the extent to which they relate to the study. In doing this, the experts were able to either remove any item they consider irrelevant or add any other item they consider important but not reflected in the instrument.

Also the checklist was further subjected to scrutiny by other experts in Home Economics Education in the Department Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin, Benin City. The criticisms and suggestions made by these experts were used by the researcher for the final modification of the instruments. This being done, the instruments content validity was ascertained.

Method of Data Analysis

The data for the analysis were obtained from the checklist, which is attendance of pupils in the years of implementation of SFP. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics of percentages, and bar charts. Also the Hypothesis was statistically tested using t-test and standard deviation to analyse the data with alpha set at 05 level of significance

Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What is rate of attendance among pupils in primary?

Schools in the selected primary schools in FCT under the SFP and those without SFP?

Table 1: Rate of Attendance among Pupils in Primary Schools in Abuja under SFP and without SFP

Academic Session	% Annual Attendance of Pupils under SFP	% Annual Attendance of Pupils without SFP
2002/2003	69	63
2003/2004	73	74
2004/2005	75	73
2005/2006	91	69
2006/2007	94	71
2007/2008	98	72

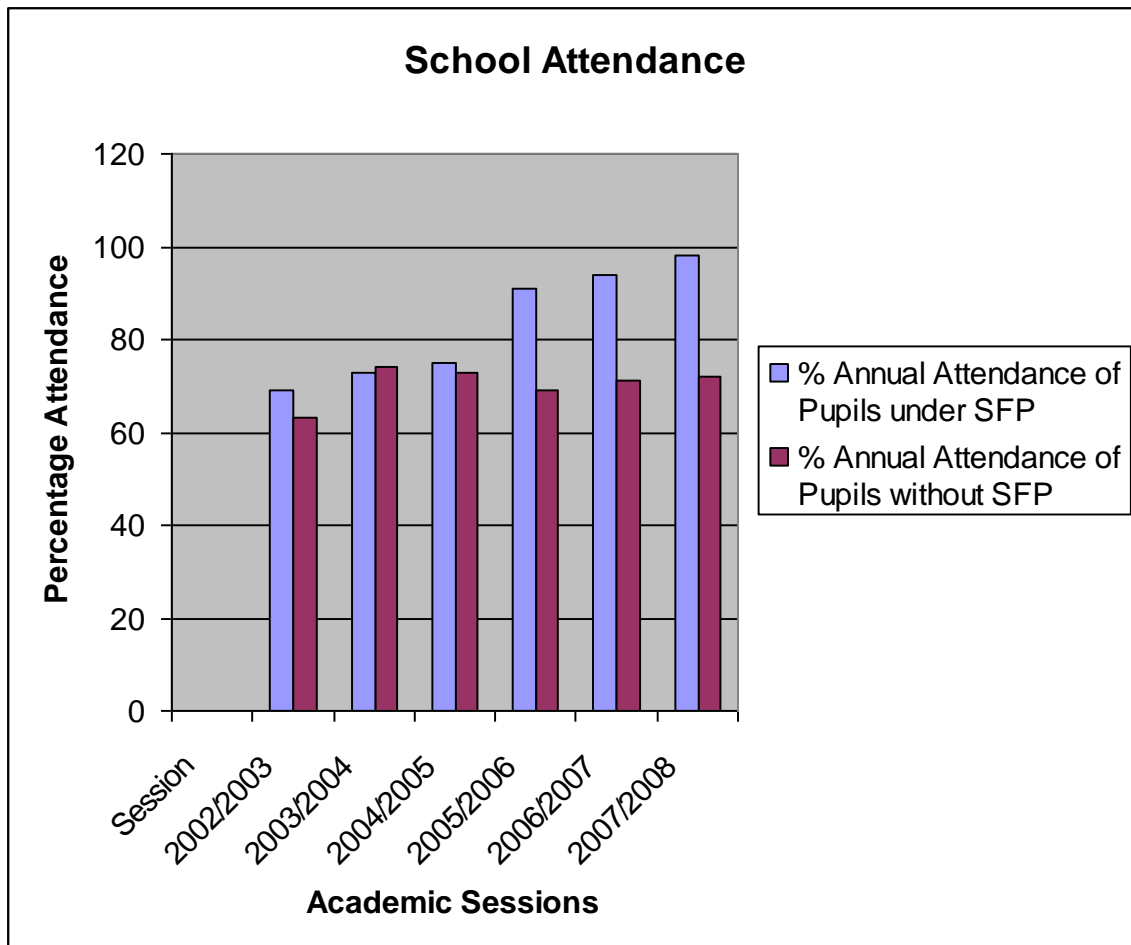


Table 1 reflects the percentage of annual attendance of pupils in the selected schools in FCT. Before the introduction of school feeding programme in the selected primary schools in Abuja, annual percentage attendance was 69% in 2002/2003, 73% in 2003/2004 and 75% in 2004/2005 academic session. With the introduction of the school feeding programme in 2005/2006 academic session, annual percentage attendance rose to 91%, and 94% in 2006/2007 and 98% in 2007/2008. Table 2 also indicates minimal increase or decrease in attendance in the schools without the school feeding programme

Research Question 2. Is there a difference between the attendance of primary school pupils under the school feeding programme and those pupils without the school feeding programme in FCT?

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the attendance of pupils under the school feeding programme and those pupils without the school feeding programme in FCT?

Table 2: t-test Calculation for Attendance of Pupils under School Feeding and without School Feeding

School with SFP			Schools without SFP			Calculated t-value	t-Critical
N ₁	X ₁	SD ₁	N ₂	X ₂	SD ₂		
385	300.50	17.16	217	172.83	35.56	*49.73	1.96

* Significant at .05

N₁ = Number of Pupils under the School feeding Programme

X₁ = Mean of Scores of Pupils under the School Feeding Programme

SD₁ = Standard Deviation of Scores of Pupils under School feeding Programme

N₂ = Number of Pupils without the School feeding Programme

X₂ = Mean of Scores of Pupils without the School Feeding Programme

SD₂ = Standard Deviation of Scores of Pupils without the School feeding Programme

Table 2 indicates that the calculated t-test of 49.73 is greater than the t-criterion at the .05 level of significance to reject the null hypothesis of no significant difference. Thus, the alternate hypothesis of a significant difference between the attendance of pupils under the school feeding programme and the attendance of pupils without the school feeding programme is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 pointed out that the introduction of school feeding programme in selected primary schools in FCT brought about increased annual percentage attendance from 69% in 2002/2003 to 98% in 2007/2008. That is, meals in the selected schools were able to motivate pupils to come to school daily and stay till the closing of the school. This result is supported by Celi (1995), Baby and Hallam (1989), Bethrman and Todd (2001), Ahmed (2002), who corroborated this finding when they found out that those children who attended schools where meals were given, became

more interested in schooling activities and so were regular in school. It is a matter of fact that, when school environment is attractive to pupils, they also become interested in academic activities, so attendance to school becomes easier for pupils to practice. This finding is further supported by Ahmed and Billam (1994), Behriman, Sengupta and Todd (2000), Chandeler (1991), Mook, Peter and Leslie (1986), Moore (1994), Rogers (2001). These researchers found that school feeding programmes have positive impact on daily attendance of pupils to school. School feeding programme according to them has been most successful in most improvised communities. According to these researchers, the programme has been a good intervention and parents encourage their children to take advantage of it, thereby increasing school participation. To further support this finding Kalipara and Summuya (2004) reported a dramatic increase in school attendance when school feeding programme was introduced in the underprivileged communities in Baran.

Table 2 reveals that attendance of pupils under the school feeding programme is significantly different from the attendance of pupils without the school feeding programme, in favour of the pupils under the school feeding programme. This means that the school feeding programme has significant impact on attendance of pupils in FCT. Ahmed and Billam (1994) supported this finding when they reported a study carried out in Bangladesh that attendance rates for boys and girls increased and were higher in food for education schools than in non-food for education schools. Janke (1996) also supported the finding when he/she reported in a study he/she carried in Chile that attendance increased tremendously in three consecutive years in schools where meals were introduced unlike other primary schools without meals. This study is also supported by WFP (2006) who reported increase of 70% to 90% rate of school attendance among pupils from 68% to 89% in 2005/2006 school year in schools where school feeding was fully implemented as against decrease in attendance in schools where there were no meals. Further support of this finding include UNDP (2006), Dall'Agua (1991), Devancy and Stuart (1998) and Del Rosso (1999) who also reported increase of attendance in schools where school meals were introduced and decrease in attendance in schools without school feeding. However, this finding is not corroborated by Chambers (1991) and WFP (2005) who evaluated the school feeding programme in Jamaica and reported that the programme did not have significant difference in attendance on schools but showed effectiveness on income transfer.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that :

1. the implementation of school feeding programme in the selected primary schools brought about increased annual percentage attendance from 69% in 2002/2003 to 98% in 2007/2008;
2. attendance of pupils under the school feeding programme was significantly different from the attendance of pupils without the school feeding programme, in favour of the pupils under the school feeding programme;

Implications for Education

This study has provided useful empirical basis for retaining the school feeding programme in primary schools in Nigeria. In the first place it is able to bring out children for schooling and keep them till the end of the school hour. By providing a stimulating environment and encouragement for pupils to attend school. This has implication of meeting the millennium development goal (2) which says that, by 2015, all nations should achieve universal primary education with children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Also with the increased attendance, more girls are attracted to school which has implication on MDG 3, which is out to promote gender equality in education and empower women. The school feeding programme is one of the powerful tools the government can use to eliminate gender disparity in primary education especially in the northern part of Nigeria, where early marriage is widely practiced.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The school feeding programme is a laudable programme with all its benefits of increasing attendance in schools. It is a suitable tool that can be utilized by the government to eradicate illiteracy towards the actualization of the millennium development goals of 2015. In addition, the dramatic impact on the attendance of pupils in schools is an indication that the programme is a tool for motivating girls to schools in situation where sociological prejudice against the schooling of girls exists as it is in the northern part of Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

- 1) The Federal Government of Nigeria should promulgate policies and objectives that will focus on how the school feeding programme can be effectively implemented all the states of country. This will enable the school feeding programme to improve on education.
- 2) Towards achieving literacy for all in no distant time, all states of the federation should be made to implement the school feeding programme so as to be able to attract all children to school; and
- 3) Meals given to pupils should be fortified to meet the nutritional deficiencies in the locality.

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